

URS

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Draft Melton Core Strategy (Publication) DPD Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment Report Non Technical Summary

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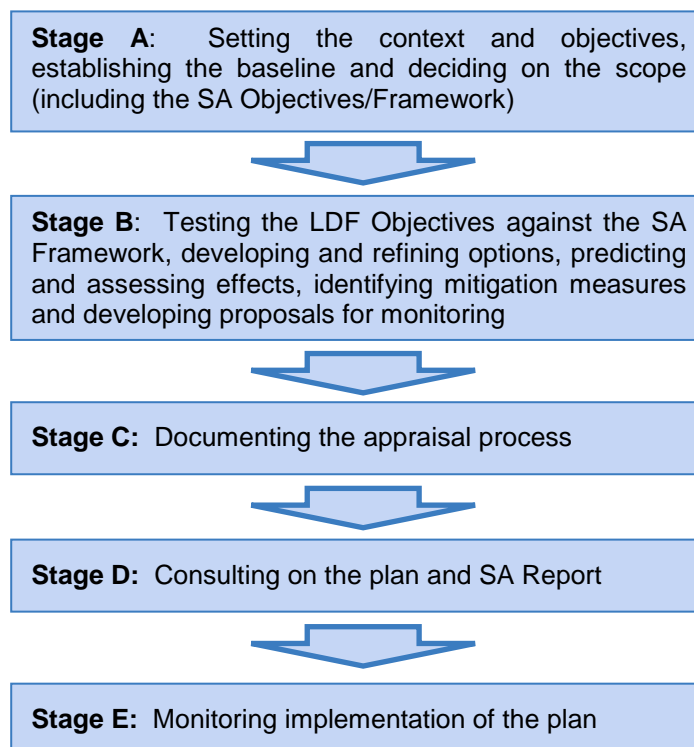
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1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is required for all land use plans. The purpose of SA is to promote sustainable development through better integration of sustainability considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans. SA is an integral part of good plan making and should not be seen as a stand alone activity. It is an on-going process that identifies the likely significant effects of the plan and the extent to which implementing the plan will achieve the social, environmental and economic objectives which have been identified as being necessary to achieve 'sustainable development'.
- 1.1.2 The Draft Melton Core Strategy (Publication) Development Plan Development (DPD) will replace the existing Melton Local Plan which was adopted in 1999.
- 1.1.3 The Draft Melton Core Strategy (Publication) DPD sets out the overall approach which the Council, working with other organisations at the local and sub-regional level, will use to guide and control the future use and development of land. Alongside the development of the Draft Melton Core Strategy (Publication) DPD, the Council has undertaken a process of SA, which incorporates statutory requirements to undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).
- 1.1.4 A SA follows five key stages, which are outlined in **Figure 1** below. Some of the stages are revisited as the plan develops and begins to take shape, and in response to consultation. This report falls within stages B and C of the process.

Figure 1: Five-Stage Approach to Sustainability Appraisal



- 1.1.5 The Core Strategy (Publication) DPD will eventually become a Core Strategy for the Borough, and as such, is intended to set out and support a long term vision for the development of the

Melton area, and a number of strategic objectives which have been identified to meet that vision. Within the Core Strategy, a spatial strategy for achieving the vision is set out, along with a series of spatial development policies, which establishes the framework for the quantity and broad locations for future growth, investment and regeneration in the Borough. The plan also includes a series of more generic, criteria-based development management policies, which provide the basis for assessing specific development proposals.

1.1.1 The full SA report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 1** introduces this report and the Melton context, and sets out the key requirements of the SEA Directive and how it has been transposed into this report.
- **Chapter 2** identifies the **sustainability objectives, baseline and context**.
- **Chapter 3** sets out our **methodology** for undertaking the SA.
- **Chapter 4** sets out the **assessment of the Melton Draft Core Strategy (Publication) DPD's strategic aim and objectives** and provides a **consideration of the alternative options**.
- **Chapter 5** sets out the **findings of the sustainability appraisal**.
- **Chapter 6** presents the **recommendations and findings of the SA**.
- **Chapter 7** suggests a series of **monitoring** indicators for managing the sustainability of the plan in the future.
- **Chapter 8** identifies **what happens next**.

It is not proposed to set out the detailed findings of the appraisal here, as this information is contained in the full SA report.

1.2 Summary of the SA/SEA Appraisal Process to date

1.2.1 As shown in Figure 1 above, the first stage in the SA process is to set up the framework for undertaking future appraisals. Generally this requires the adoption of a set of sustainability objectives and the collection of baseline information which can act as an evidence base to inform the appraisal. The framework and evidence base are presented in a 'Scoping Report' for consultation with stakeholders, including most importantly, the statutory consultees (English Heritage, the Environment Agency and Natural England).

1.2.2 An LDF Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report for Melton was produced in February 2006. An update to the baseline and context review within this Scoping Report was carried out as part of the SA of the Melton LDF Core Strategy (Preferred Options) in January 2008 and is set out in section 4.7 of the Core Strategy (Preferred Options) SA report. A subsequent Scoping Report Update was prepared in July 2009 as a range of studies had been undertaken since the preparation of the initial scoping report to support the evidence base and it was considered that this should be recorded.

1.2.3 Since the preparation of the Scoping Report Update in July 2009, further evidence base documents have been prepared and there have been a number of changes to the national policy framework. Therefore, an Addendum Scoping Report was prepared in June 2011 to ensure that any new sustainability issues arising from the evidence base and revised national policy framework were identified and recorded.

- 1.2.4 In preparing the Core Strategy (Publication) DPD the Council must consider reasonable alternative approaches to achieving the vision and objectives of the Plan. A number of 'options' or alternative approaches were considered at the Issues and Options stage (2006) and published in a Core Strategy Options document for public consultation (April 2006). An Issues and Options SA report was prepared to assess these options and published alongside the main consultation document. This Issues and Options SA report, alongside the public consultation responses received in response to the publication of these documents, helped to inform the early work on policy development.
- 1.2.5 On the basis of the findings of the Core Strategy Issues and Options SA Report (2006) and in response to comments received on the Core Strategy Issues and Options consultation document, the Core Strategy Preferred Options Report (2008) was prepared. This was published for public consultation in January 2008. The Preferred Options were accompanied by a SA/SEA Report, which used the same SA framework as the Core Strategy Issues and Options SA Report (2006).
- 1.2.6 Following the consultation on the Preferred Options SA Report in January 2008 additional data and studies were made available that allowed for an improved spatial analysis of the Direction of Growth Options. In August 2009 a Directions of Growth SA report was produced as an addendum document to the Preferred Options SA Report (January 2008).

2 What is the Situation Now?

2.1 Policy Context

- 2.1.1 The policy context that guides the Draft Melton Core Strategy (Publication) includes national planning policy (in the form of Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance Notes) and a Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the East Midlands published in 2009¹.
- 2.1.2 A draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was subject to consultation in summer 2011. The aim of the NPPF is to simplify the existing regime to make the planning process more accessible. It focuses on using planning to promote sustainable development, including attracting growth and business, and creating the infrastructure for a growing population without damaging the environment. It aims to promote sustainable development without delay and introduces a “presumption in favour of sustainable development”. The emerging NPPF may be subject to considerable changes before it takes its final format.
- 2.1.3 With national planning policy providing an over-arching framework, the East Midlands RSS provides the regional and sub-regional planning context. The RSS sits within the LDF of each Local Authority in the East Midlands. The RSS refines national policy in the context of the East Midlands, and includes important policy direction for the Local Authority level, including targets for housing development in the Borough.
- 2.1.4 One of the provisions of the Localism Act is to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies. With the proposed removal of RSS, it will fall on individual local authorities to determine appropriate housing and employment targets; but these must be able to meet the tests of soundness in terms of being justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy.
- 2.1.5 The currently adopted local planning policy of the Borough and its adjoining local authorities also informs the development of the Core Strategy.
- 2.1.6 Local, sub-regional, regional and national policy on issues such as transport, health and education also informs the development of the Core Strategy.

2.2 Summary of the Baseline Data

- 2.2.1 The SA Scoping Report for the Melton LDF prepared in 2006 and updated in 2009 and 2011, sets out the full picture of the current status and performance of the Borough in relation to a number of sustainability issues. A number of key issues emerge from the baseline data that are the most pressing sustainability issues for Melton. These are:
- There is a need to reduce traffic congestion in Melton Mowbray;
 - Melton is underachieving in terms of keeping SSSIs in good condition in comparison to county and regional averages;
 - Levels of household waste and recycling rates perform poorly in comparison to regional and national statistics;

¹ Please note the impending abolition of the RSS through the Localism Act 2011.

- There are a series of issues relating to deficiencies in the open space, sport and recreation in Melton which need to be addressed, including access to play provision, amenity greenspace and natural and semi natural areas;
- There is a need to protect the agricultural quality of land and the landscape and historic urban character within the Borough;
- Future development in the Borough should be protected from flooding; and
- There is a need to accommodate future housing requirements including the need for special needs housing, social rented accommodation and intermediate affordable housing across the Borough. There is also a need to support and locate new development in locations which reduce reliance on the private car and minimise the distance people have to travel, and to ensure equality of access to housing, employment and services through an integrated public transport network.

2.3 What will the Situation be without the Plan?

- 2.3.1 There is potential for negative impacts on the Borough's environment in the future if new development is not managed appropriately. In addition, without strategic direction, the Borough's social and economic problems will only be exacerbated, and with that will come greater social inequality.
- 2.3.2 The "saved" Melton Local Plan (1999) sets out a range of policies that govern development in the Borough. However, these policies are likely to become out of date over time, due to changes in population, climate change and central government policy. The 'saved' Local Plan policies will therefore not provide an adequate basis for guiding new development in the future. Without an up-to-date framework to manage new development and land use, Melton would be likely to be subject to a continuation of negative sustainability trends and a likely loss of environmental assets.
- 2.3.3 In summary, it is clear that it would be unsustainable to move forward without a new planning framework for the Borough and the move to establish such a framework through the Core Strategy is welcomed.

3 What will the Situation be with the Plan?

3.1.1 A detailed discussion of the predicted sustainability effects of the Draft Melton Core Strategy (Publication) can be found in sections 4, 5, 6 and Appendix 3 of the SA report. The following discussion provides a brief overview of these effects.

3.2 Cumulative Effects of the Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy

3.2.1 Considering all the Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy policies together, the overall picture is positive, although a number of measures to mitigate identified effects have been recommended, and should be put in place to improve the overall sustainability of the plan.

Environment

3.2.2 Overall, it is considered that the Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy will have predominantly positive environmental impacts, in that it directs development away from open space and the countryside where the majority of high value biodiversity sites are located, and should improve the environmental quality of these areas. The implementation of the Core Strategy is likely to have positive impacts on the environment by using the sequential approach to direct development to previously developed land, encouraging the remediation of contaminated land and where Greenfield sites provide the only appropriate land, directing development to areas of lower environmental quality first.

3.2.3 In the Borough's rural areas, the environmental impacts of the Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy are generally positive as the concentration of development in the rural centres should preserve the best and most versatile agricultural and open land, which may have biodiversity value and encourage the remediation of previously developed land.

3.2.4 By requiring new development in Melton to be delivered to a high design and environmental standard, the implementation of the Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy will have a positive impact on the visual landscape and long term sustainability of the built and historic environment in the Borough.

3.2.5 The implementation of the Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy transport policies will lead to reduced traffic movements against the current baseline. This will lead to reduced emissions throughout Melton

Economy

3.2.6 Through the provision of land for new business formation, the safeguarding of existing employment sites, the encouragement and support to employment opportunities in high value and knowledge-based industries and those developments which will improve skills and provide higher value jobs, the Core Strategy will help improve the quality and number of employment opportunities in the Borough. The implementation of the Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy will ultimately help stimulate economic growth in the Borough and maintain economic development and employment as well as contributing to the provision of adequate premises to support the economy.

- 3.2.7 The implementation of the Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy will improve vitality of Melton Mowbray town centre, which will boost the economy in a number of ways.
- 3.2.8 The redevelopment of a number of strategic town centre sites through the Town Centre Area Action Plan and the promotion of retail (including comparison shopping), leisure and office uses in the town centre will increase the number of employment opportunities in the Borough. The reinforcement of the 'Rural Capital for Food' image will ensure that the current economic strength of the Borough in convenience shopping is maintained and enhanced.
- 3.2.9 The economic impacts of the Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy in rural areas are positive as new development generally facilitates economic growth and prosperity. The Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy seeks to allocate land to meet identified local employment needs in Bottesford and Long Clawson; this should encourage new business formation and potentially reduce economic disparities in the Borough.
- 3.2.10 The social impacts of the Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy in rural areas are also positive through the concentration of new development to meet local need in accessible rural centres and through the future implementation of a Neighbourhood Plan or similar robust, community-led strategies.
- 3.2.11 The implementation of the Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy transport policies and the subsequent provision of a strategic road network is essential to realising the Core Strategy vision of development to the north of Melton Mowbray being a sustainable extension to the town, rather than a base for trips elsewhere in the Borough and Leicestershire and beyond.

Community

- 3.2.12 The pattern of development proposed in the Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy is likely to facilitate sustainable growth. By promoting development in the most sustainable locations, the Core Strategy will safeguard existing services, and provide new community services and infrastructure including healthcare. Focusing growth in well connected areas will negate the need to travel to access services.
- 3.2.13 The Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy should contribute towards meeting the demand for type and quantity of affordable housing throughout the Borough. Providing a mix of good quality, appropriate housing, with sufficient affordable units; is likely to tackle some of the Borough's key exclusion and deprivation issues.
- 3.2.14 The transport policies within the Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy could lead to benefits in the accessibility of goods and services particularly in the medium and/or long term, particularly with regard to the equitability of access given to those households that do not own a car.
- 3.2.15 The promotion of walking, cycling and public transport in the Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy is expected to decrease the time people spend in cars and increase the amount of exercise while travelling, which is likely to improve levels of health.
- 3.2.16 The implementation of the Draft Melton (Publication) Core Strategy will be important in ensuring that funding for new and improved infrastructure is obtained and delivered. It is considered that the coordinated delivery of infrastructure through a local infrastructure delivery group should ensure that appropriate community and social facilities are planned for.

- 3.2.17 The sustainable urban extension proposed for Melton Mowbray within the Draft Melton (Publication) including the delivery of 1,000 new homes, associated community and retail facilities will have a number of sustainability benefits, including the creation of employment opportunities in the short, medium and long term. The provision of a Gypsy and Traveller site as part of new development towards the north of Melton Mowbray will further contribute towards delivering a stock of housing accommodation that meets the needs of the community.

4 Recommendations

4.1 Recommended Mitigation

4.1.1 A number of minor mitigation measures were proposed in the November 2011 version of this SA Report - which appraised a working draft version of the Publication Core Strategy DPD. The six recommendations made in the November SA report have all been adopted by the Council. As a consequence, just one further minor recommendation remains, as follows:

- Policy CS13: Insert the word “alternative” in the following sentence, to make this clearer:

‘Development should be located on land with the least environmental value where *alternative* appropriate land is not available or suitable’.

4.2 Recommended Monitoring

4.2.1 The Melton Draft Core Strategy (Publication) DPD (Appendix 2) proposes a monitoring framework for monitoring the impacts of the Draft Core Strategy (Publication). This framework has been developed from those indicators presented in Appendix 2 of the Melton LDF SA Scoping Report May 2006 and Section 10 of the Core Strategy (Preferred Options) January 2008. This SA Report supports this monitoring framework.

4.2.2 Separately the Council is also responsible for publishing a LDF Monitoring Report, and it is expected that the two processes of monitoring can be combined in order to achieve efficiencies.

5 The Difference made by this Sustainability Appraisal

- 5.1.1 The November 2011 SA report made a number of minor recommendations that aimed to improve the Core Strategy and its implementation. Melton Borough Council considered these recommendations and have subsequently incorporated all of these recommendations into the Draft Core Strategy Publication DPD. A further, very minor recommendation for the policy wording of Policy CS13 is made in this version of the SA Report (January 2012). The Publication Core Strategy may be further modified by the pending period of consultation with the public and statutory bodies, including the three SEA Consultation Bodies².
- 5.1.2 SA has contributed to plan development by providing an independent assessment of the sustainability of:
- firstly, the Council's Core Strategy Issues and Options document (September 2006);
 - secondly, the resulting Core Strategy Preferred Options Paper (2008);
 - thirdly, the Council's Directions of Growth Options (2009); and
 - fourthly, the Council's Draft Core Strategy (Publication) DPD (November 2011 and January 2012).
- 5.1.3 The process has therefore provided an ongoing check on the sustainability of the emerging Core Strategy, in accordance with government guidance. The assessment also identifies likely significant effects, which should inform more detailed discussions over individual developments and planning applications.
- 5.1.4 In terms of sustainability, the ultimate effectiveness of the Core Strategy will depend on an effective partnership between Melton Borough Council, statutory partners, prospective developers and the community at large.

²English Heritage, the Environment Agency and Natural England (the last effective from October 2006 - formerly the two separate bodies of English Nature and the Countryside Agency)

6 Next Steps

- 6.1.1 The SA report and this Non-Technical Summary are available for comment alongside the Draft Core Strategy (Publication) DPD.³
- 6.1.2 Preparation of the Core Strategy has already been through a number of stages during which extensive consultation has taken place. Consultation on the Draft Core Strategy (Publication) DPD will run for a six week period between **X and Y**.
- 6.1.3 The Planning Inspectorate has issued guidance for respondents entitled 'Local Development Frameworks – Examining Development Plan Documents: Procedural Guidance' (August 2009). This document can be found on the Planning Inspectorate's web site at the following link: http://www.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/pins/appeals/local_dev/dpd_procedure_guide_aug09.pdf
- 6.1.4 The Council are keen to promote the submission of comments electronically and will encourage anyone with appropriate facilities to make their responses in this way. An electronic version of the official comment form can be found on the Council's web site at: **add link**. Forms can be returned to the following email address: ldf@melton.gov.uk or alternatively, completed comment forms can be returned by post to the following address by no later than **date**:

**Melton Local Development Framework
Melton Borough Council
Parkside
Station Approach
Burton Street
Melton Mowbray
Leicestershire
LE13 1GH**

- 6.1.5 Should the policies in the Draft Core Strategy (Publication) DPD undergo any significant changes in the future prior to submission, including as a result of taking into account any representations received on the Draft Core Strategy (Publication) DPD, the significant changes will also be required to undergo further SA.

³ Regulation 27 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008